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The Justifying Value
Of A Public Park

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A CONSIDERATION OF

THE JUSTIFYING VALUE

OF A

PUBLIC PARK.

PREPARED AT THE REQUEST OF THE AMERICAN SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION, AND READ AT ITS MEETING IN SARATOGA, 1880.

By FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED.

BOSTON:
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1881.

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THE JUSTIFYING VALUE OF A PUBLIC PARK.

After the Paper now to be read had been mainly prepared I was advised of a wish that it might lead on to a discussion of the sub-

OUR large town parks are public trusts, so loosely defined as to fix no clear limits to the use which may be legitimately or honorably made of the lands, materials, funds, or official "influence," which belong to them. The most essential duty under them may be neglected without wreck of character or sense of shame. To say as to any point in question of their management "it is a matter of taste," generally means that every trustee is as to that point a law unto himself. This paper, which touches the question of a possible basis of stricter accountability, has been printed in the Journal of the American Social Science Association, but with such errors, owing to a miscarriage of proofs, that I wish to offer corrected copies to those having a special interest in the topic discussed. The feeling which has lately been evinced against plans urged by able and worthy men for subverting the most important features of the Central Park of New York by buildings, roads, walks, and decorative garden-work suitable to a world's fair ground, and a growing dislike shown elsewhere to the introduction of objects and methods of decoration in public grounds thought to be incongruous with their character, may be hoped to indicate a ripening of public opinion favorable to the ends of the paper.

A bill has just been introduced in the Legislature of New York by Senator Astor, entitled "An Act to Define and Limit the Uses of Public Parks," which declares that all properties so classed under the laws of the State, when exceeding 100 acres in extent, "are intended and shall be appropriated for the recreation of the people by means of their rural, sylvan, and natural scenery and character," that they must be used and managed in accordance with this definition and that "no ground in them shall be appropriated or used in such a manner as to lessen their value and advantages for such recreation."

A striking illustration of the equivocal use which prevails of the word park and of the harm liable to result from it, has recently occurred. Lord Dufferin, deploring the destruction of the appropriate scenery of Niagara Falls, and seeking means to arrest it and restore a natural aspect to the shores, suggested a scheme for what he, unfortunately, though with strict propriety, termed an international park. It is a serious obstacle to the purpose which he had in view, that under this term few seem to suppose that anything can be intended which does not involve costly gardening "decoration" which would be simply savage.

January 28, 1881, F. L. O.

a proposed operation at a time when these results, although the operation shall be apparently complete, are yet immature, pro-

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THE JUSTIFYING VALUE OF A PUBLIC PARK.

After the Paper now to be read had been mainly prepared I was advised of a wish that it might lead on to a discussion of the subject of parks at low cost for small towns. The topic which I had adopted being a more comprehensive one, I will introduce it by a few observations, showing how the question of cost for parks of any class, for towns large or small, cannot well be discussed independently of it.

The cost of a park depends on two considerations back of economy of management; back, also, of a plan as commonly understood: the first is the use intended to be made of it, or the general aims of the undertaking; the second, the degree in which the site to be improved is adapted to these aims. As to the first, it is liable to be overlooked that the aims of a park may be so low that the result will be of less value than no park at all. This has been proved over and over again. As to adaptation of site, it is also liable to be forgotten that a hundred acres of land in one situation may be turned, at a given cost, into a more useful park than two hundred in another; and that two hundred acres of land, of one sort, may be prepared for a given use, of a given population, at less cost than one hundred of another sort.

These considerations being recognized, the special perplexity of park business will be understood to lie in the fact that, whatever determinations as to use you set out with, whatever aims control your choice of site and your plan of improvements; whatever rules for economy you fix upon, you have no assurance in law, custom or public common sense, that they will not soon be thrown overboard. This, again, being understood, it will not be difficult to realize that the great danger to be guarded against in setting about a park, is one which is commonly disguised under the phrase, "practical business tact," or "practical common-sense," meaning a habit of mind, cultivated in commercial life, of judging values by the market estimate. What answers to the market estimate, in park values, is commonly a guess as to what the public will think of the results of a proposed operation at a time when these results, although the operation shall be apparently complete, are yet immature, pro-

visional and tentative; and, as in this condition, they will be regarded from the point of view, not of commercial competition, but of mental relaxation. Under these circumstances, most important elements of value are liable to be wholly disregarded.

For example, in any well-designed park-work, the character of each of several parts is largely determined with a motive (over and above any that appears in the work as seen by itself) of enhancing the value of all other parts, and of gaining enhancement of value by the character to be given all other parts. Again, much the larger share of the value to be ultimately earned by the park, depends on the gradual merging together of elements of value originally detached, and which, as seen in this detached condition (as they must be for years after work has apparently ceased with reference to them), show nothing, and to most minds, suggest nothing of the value which they potentially possess.

These, I think, are two plain reasons, but as it happens to apply more directly to my main purpose, I should like to refer also to another embarrassment of the ordinary pleasure-seeker's judgment, which is not so plain. I may, indeed, be excused for doubting if, in this scientific audience, there are many who suspect the degree in which considerations of stability and endurance enter into any sound estimate of the value of park-work, or who realize in what manner these elements of value may be represented in objects which, to the mind seeking relaxation, exhibit qualities of an entirely different character; objects of little more apparent stability than the maize in the farmer's field, which next month is to be cleared of it, and ploughed over for a spring sowing of oats. So few are prepared to accept what is sound in this respect and it has so much to do with the question, what it is worth while for a small but promising town to undertake in a park, and of what is low cost with reference to it, that I beg to offer a little evidence bearing on the point.

It is more than two hundred years since Mr. Pepys wrote of going in his new coach to the King's Park, and of the "innumerable appearance of gallants," which he there found, sauntering among the trees. Of those trees it is possible that some have not yet succumbed to the acrid atmosphere of London. It is certain that many held their own long enough, and were enough valued, to preserve the general outlines and surface of the park against all suggestions of change, and thus indirectly to influence the leading lines of

miles of streets, and establish the position of later park plantings, of which we now have the result. What had then been done, determines where today shade shall be found, where prospects screened or opened, where millions of men and women are yet to direct their steps. Mr. Pepys' road is still in use, and not many years ago it was plainly to be seen where its grade was affected, its breadth contracted, and its course deflected, out of respect to a single tree which he probably saw as a sapling, the trunk and roots of which had grown into it. Of most of the bridges, conduits, markets, and landing-places of London, of that period, only curious fragments remain. The King's Park was never as much, or as well used as it is at present, and for the purposes of its most important use, has few substantial advantages or disadvantages not to be traced to determinations formed long, long ago; when London, in comparison with its present state, was a very small town.

In Paris, the series of groves and greens which lie between the ruins of the Tuileries and the long-since levelled gate toward the Woods of Boulogne had its beginning as far back, at least, as the sixteenth century, when, as we now reckon, Paris, also, was a small town; and no motive has had more weight in determining the plan of the great town growing from it, than that of sparing and providing for the extension and uninterrupted use of these grounds.

The present town park of Dijon was laid out by Le Nôtre before these waters of Saratoga had been tasted by a white man, and its plan is as different from any modern park as the personal costume of that day differs from that we are wearing. But, visiting it not long since, I found the town forester following orders which Le Nôtre had given, and the ground better realizing the pictures which must have been in his mind, than it could possibly have done while he lived. The roads, walks, seats; the verdant carpets, the leafy vistas, — in none of these had the original work lost value. Never before were they as well adapted to their designed use, or worth as much for it. Where is the public building of the same date, of which, as a town property, the same can be said?

Most old, large towns would supply some like evidence. There are woody resorts in Rome which have been woody resorts from the time of the Cæsars. The Mount of Olives still serves as a place of retreat from the confinement and bustle of the streets of Jerusalem, and its present groves are believed to have sprung from the roots of trees planted centuries before the summer days when the humble

friends of a certain unpractical Jew were apt to look for him among the afternoon strollers under their shade.

There is no people in the world who would take more honest and respectable pride and satisfaction in having their work done with a view to considerations of intrinsic and lasting value than our own; but it is at present impossible that the impression we casually form of our inceptive park-work shall take fairly into account its substantial merits or short-comings. Parks, of all things, should not be taken hold of as frontier expedients. Makeshift, temporizing, catch-penny work upon them is always extravagant work. The men hitherto more directly in trust of our parks have not been specially prone to the trading view of them. Though raw in respect to park service, they have usually been high-minded servants of the public. But they have been constrained by public opinion to waste much of what their free judgment would secure, and there is but one way in which the difficulty can be got over. It is by bringing public opinion itself to take a larger interest in the lasting conditions of accruing value in a park; and experience suggests that this is of even more importance, and of greater difficulty, in small towns, and in regard to parks for moderate use, than with respect to undertakings the magnitude and costliness of which is better fitted to affect the imagination in this respect.

One of the chemists engaged in the discussion of this Association on the subject of the Adulterations of Food, the other night, said that all were agreed that everything should be known in the market by its own name: that if we wanted glucose we should not have to take it with the name of sugar; if oleomargarine, not as butter. There is a difficulty in discussing questions of cost and value in parks, lying in the fact that the public is so far from a common understanding of what the unadulterated substance of a park may be. If I now proceed upon my own notion in this respect, I may be met, as a dealer once told me that he had been by a young housekeeper who complained that if she left the stuff which he sold her for milk to stand a little while "a nasty yellow scum rose on it." "So it always does, madam, on good milk." "Never, sir," she rejoined, "never, on what I call milk."

I have lately known the word "park" applied to the protecting belt of a reservoir, to a fish-pond, a sea beach and a jail yard; to scores of things which have the least possible of public interest in common. I have seen a low rocky shore having what I regard as park-value beyond estimate, in tints, lights and shadows and

reflections of translucent and opaque foliage over rippling water, and full of poetic mystery, — of beauty such as no painter can render. I have seen such a shore so changed that the water lay dead upon a wall of raw stone, capped by an inclined plane of turf; all possible architectural beauty lost through meaningless meanderings; all value which might have been in simple breadth of turf, destroyed by pinning it down with prim pegs of living spruce and arbor vitæ. And this result I have heard praised as park-like.

Therefore, I had begun my paper (which I now reach) with some observations on this point, recalling the fact that while the few public properties which had the name of park with us, twenty-five years ago, did not differ from others known as greens, commons, or yards; yet the word had a meaning by no other so well given. Scores of times I have heard plain country people, Northern and Southern, Eastern and Western, describe something they had seen as "park-like," or "pretty as a park," or as "a perfect natural park." It might be Blue Ridge table-lands, oak openings further west, mesquit-grass prairies beyond the Trinity, or passages of the Genessee Flats or Connecticut Bottoms. What did the word mean? Nothing in the least practical. It reported nothing of the soil, of the water-power, of quarries or quartz lodes. It told of a certain influence of *conditions solely of scenery*, — soothing and reposeful influences. If we trace back this use of the word, it will carry us to the immigrations of the early part of the seventeenth century, before the replanting of English parks under the urgings of Evelyn, the Royal Society and the Admiralty, when there were generally broader spaces of greensward within them, and yet more of spacious seclusion from all without than even at present.

I beg that this significance of the word may be kept in mind a little while.

Twenty-five years ago we had no parks, park-like or otherwise, which might not better have been called something else. Since then a class of works so called has been undertaken which, to begin with, are at least spacious, and which hold possibilities of all park-like qualities. Upon twenty of these works in progress, there has been thus far expended upwards of forty millions of dollars, — well nigh if not fully fifty millions, — and this figure does not tell the whole story of cost, as I will later show. Considering that in none of the towns making this outlay the necessity of a park was a little while ago at all felt, a remarkable progress of public demand is thus

manifested. It will be found the more remarkable when it is considered that, in all Europe, but one notable public park had been laid out in the first half of this century; that this was formed on ground previously a royal hunting park, not by the government of the town, not by taxing the town, and not with an eye single to the town's advantage. But to see the full significance of the fact it is further necessary to consider that within the same period, since 1850, as many parks have been laid out for the people of large towns in Europe as with us, and that the area which has been for the first time legally and definitely appropriated to that end is larger there than here. What has been secured for London alone is of greater extent than all the town parks of America together.* At the same time there has been a radical change in the management of many of the old parks.

Allow me to use the term *park movement*, with reference to what has thus recently occurred on both continents. With us, it dates from Mr. Downing's writings on the subject in 1849. But these could not have obtained the public attention they did, nor have proved the seed of so large a harvest, but for their timeliness, and a condition of expectancy in the soil upon which they fell.

Our first act of park legislation was in 1851. In 1853, the first Commissioners for the Central Park entered upon their duties. It was only in the latter year that some ill-considered steps were taken toward supplying Paris with its first public park. It was not till 1855 that Mr. Alphand came from Bordeaux, and gave the work its final form and impetus. A little earlier, three small park undertakings had been entered upon in England, the leading one under the direction of Paxton, afterwards Sir Joseph. I know of none in Germany, Italy or Belgium; but a few years afterward, I saw in each of these countries evidence that, about the same time, planting and gardening for the public benefit had taken new life.

Parks have plainly not come as the direct result of any of the great inventions or discoveries of the century. They are not, with us, simply an improvement on what we had before, growing out of a general advance of the arts applicable to them. It is not evident that the movement was taken up in any country from any other, however it may have been influenced or accelerated. It did not run like a fashion. It would seem rather to have been a common, spontaneous movement of that sort which we conveniently refer to the "Genius of Civilization."

*Chiefly in recent action in respect to Epping Forest.

I do not take this way of disposing of the question of its origin, impulse and aim, which I will discuss later. I wish here only that the reflection may be made that a wide-spread popular movement is not, naturally, all at once perfectly clear-headed, coherent and perspicuous in its demands. In other words, it is hardly to be supposed that the popular demand represented in parks has yet taken the fully mature, self-conscious form of thoroughly-reasoned purposes and principles, and has insisted on an accurate embodiment of them in the works ordered. It is more reasonable to assume that it has not.

I wish to present this assumption in a practical form. Let me suppose that a man has become possessed, near a town, of adjoining properties comprising one or two farms, with marsh land, woodland, pastures, mill-pond, quarry and brickyard. It is crossed by roads, upon which there is some pleasure-driving; the pond is used for skating, the hill-sides for coasting, the pastures for kite-flying, base ball and target-firing; snipe are shot in the marshes, rabbits trapped in the woods. There are neglected private properties so used for recreation by the public near most of our towns. Now, suppose that the man dies, leaving an infant heir; twenty years afterwards the heir dies, and the entire property is to come by will to the town on condition that the town spends half a million dollars to make it a park. Suppose the old roads are improved and furnished with sidewalks and shade trees; the brickyard fitted for a parade ground, the marsh for a rifle range; and that the quarry, with masonry and gates added, becomes a town reservoir. Part of the ground is taken for a cemetery; a statue of the former owner is set on the highest hill; a museum and public library take the place of the homestead; an armory is provided, a hospital, poor-house, high school, conservatory, camera-obscura, prospect tower, botanic and zoological garden, archery, lawn-tennis and croquet-grounds, billiard-house, skating-rink, racket court, ten-pin alley, riding-school, Turkish bath, mineral springs, restaurants, pagodas, pavilions, and a mall, terrace and concert garden. Suppose that the town has spent its half million, several times over, in these things, and that the courts can have found reason (I know not how) to decide that the condition of the bequest has been complied with. Suppose that a due part of all the town outlay in the premises has been set down in the town books to old accounts, so far as applicable, as to account of waterworks, street improve-

ments, schools, hospitals, and so on; and that, after all, there is found something which must be charged under the new head of "parks."

Now, suppose that a question is raised whether this expenditure has been made in good faith, with reference to the proper objects and distinctive value of a park, and has been judiciously and economically directed, and that a popular judgment (not a technical court judgment) is asked upon this issue, what would be the result? Few men would have a sufficiently clear idea of the objects and the conditions of value of a park to form a judgment; those who had would differ widely in their ideas, and most of the more judicial and properly leading minds would hold such ideas as they had with enough of doubt to make them slow either to fully support or decisively condemn those responsible. This, unquestionably, would be the case much more than it would in regard to any other large matter of town expenditure.

Let this unreadiness of popular judgment be considered for a moment in connection with certain faults in our methods of public business. This Association needs no explanation of them. It is sufficient to say that changes in the fundamental laws of our parks, in the boards governing them, or in the bodies governing these boards, occur annually. A certain weakness of human nature, usually exhibited in some degree after such changes, is expressed in the proverb, "New brooms sweep clean." There is generally a disposition with each new man in office to find an *ex post facto* reason for his being there. In the absence of any restraint, such as lies with reference to other public works, in a definite and well established public understanding of what is to be accomplished, there is nothing to prevent a novice in a park board, or in the office of mayor, comptroller or member of city council, from aiming to make changes of organization, and to force a course of operations adapted to discountenance some of the aims of work previously done, and with this motive to lay waste what funds under the same trust had before been used to obtain. There have already been such cases. In one a large outlay has been made, and the money is claimed to have been honestly used, with the unquestionable intent of nullifying what at least half a million dollars had been previously spent to gain. It has happened more than once that plans have been adopted, work advanced under them, then thrown aside by new men, new plans adopted, and, after some years, these in their turn abandoned, and the

original plans resumed. The change of purpose in such cases will have been deliberate and intentional. But changes as great and as wasteful are more likely to occur through the passing of park works under the control, direct or indirect, of men who, through simple ignorance, forgetfulness, or indifference to such aims as have before-time been had in view, let a large share of the value that has been once secured slip through their fingers.*

But now, if I have suggested the special hazard, under our special political customs, of the lack of a well-understood central and distinctive purpose in the management of these large town properties, I wish to add that, back of this, but closely united with it, there is a more positive and a deeper seated difficulty. Briefly, it is the difficulty of dispossessing the mind of ideas which are associated with an object when, through lapse of time and change of circumstances, the nature of that object and its conditions of value have been radically changed. This difficulty, in individual experience, is not an uncommon one, but, with regard to this matter of parks, it is largely a transmitted experience, and I can think of no quite parallel case by which to explain it.

Its full elucidation would carry me into a history of a class of property unknown with us, but which, throughout the Old World, has for many centuries been of importance. Its value has been in two kinds; forest materials and game. It has been managed with reference to each, systematically, by classes of men specially trained to their duties, and since no other equally extensive property has had so much of what is called sentimental value, as to none has service been so much handed down from father to son, and as to none have traditional ideas been more persistent. There are many thousands of such properties, of which the character and methods of management and use have changed little since the period of the Crusades. In England they are mostly called parks, and there the changes have been greater, as a rule, than on the continent. Still, in some essential particulars, the sentiment of conservatism with regard to them, not only with their owners for the time being, but with the people at large, is very strong.

*In the short history of one of our parks, a change in the immediate direction of the plantations has occurred not less than six times, and in each case the new appointee has shown a disposition to upset the methods of his predecessor, and twice, at least, such changes have been thus accomplished, amounting to serious changes of general design. Upon another park, for which I am supposed to have some responsibility, the resident professional superintendent was changed five times in three years.

Some few of these old forest and hunting properties, once belonging to kings, and situated near growing towns, came after a time to be used by the townspeople for their own amusement, much as neglected private lands near our towns often are now. Gradually such use of them established something like a vested right, and so, by very slow degrees, from kings' parks, they came to be regarded as at least pseudo-public parks.

I say by slow degrees. A single fact will indicate how slowly, and suggest, with reference to their management, how imperfectly. That great park which we know so well for its Merry Wives' recreations; with its antlered stags in waiting for royal hunting parties; its phantom huntsman; its foresters' saw-pits with children hiding in them; is now surrounded with towns and villages, and is an important feature of suburban London. It is nearer to the West End than Long Branch to the Battery, and is accessible by boats and three lines of railway, running cheap excursion trains. It is an object not simply of town but of national pride. In its use and value as a public park, a thousand times more than anything else, lies the proper concern of government with it. Yet, as late as four years ago, the only allusion to it as a public park, in the stated report to Parliament of the commissioner in charge, was contained in two lines, in which the extent to which it is used for public recreation is mentioned as a reason why the commissioner cannot make a better return from the sale of timber and other forest products, the letting of pasturage, and so on. It will be remembered, also, that yet every year a somewhat ridiculous public ceremony is performed in this park, called a hunt with the royal hounds, in which a venerable stag is turned out of a wagon and set after with great outcry, but with special precautions against his being seriously hurt when overtaken. These two facts suggest the degree in which the ancient theory of the use, value and economic management of this property has had influence with those in charge of it down to this very day.

Hyde Park, which may be considered as more particularly the progenitor of modern public parks, is now in the midst of London (the town having grown around it since the time of Mr. Pepys). But Hyde Park was classed with Windsor and under the same management when I first visited it, only thirty years ago. I believe that it was transferred to a special commission, appointed, not by the local authorities, but by Parliament, at the time of the

first International Exhibition, but, though the deer and kennels have been removed, some of the rangers or gamekeepers are still living upon it and there is an attractive private residence in the middle of it, with stables and gardens, occupied by a gentleman who represents the office corresponding for this park to that held for Woodstock Chase by The Loyal Lee in the seventeenth century, as described by Scott.

One of the two great parks of Paris was an imperial forest and hunting ground as late as 1850, the other still later. The public park of Florence was the grand duke's private property until the last revolution. The greater part of it is a dense wood, managed on the principles of economic forestry. The park of Munich, which people say was laid out by Rumford as a sanitary measure, is of the same character; it is still stocked with deer for the king's hunting, and its resident superintendent is a gamekeeper, as his father was before him. I saw him inspecting the repair of roads after a storm; he carried a gun in his hand, and was followed by aged hounds.

The names of the parks of Berlin and Stockholm indicate what they have been; each, in a different language, meaning a place for keeping deer.

I could show from facts of personal observation how, much more than it is easy to realize, the present condition of even the most changed of these old parks has thus been determined by motives as foreign to the forms of recreation in which their public value now lies, as the motives of a cotton mill are from those of a cathedral, and how the customs of management and of use now prevailing, have been, *per force*, largely fitted to these traditional motives. Also, how some of these customs, foreign in every sense to us, have lately emigrated and are crowding out that which is natural to us and belongs to our common sense.

I hope I have said enough to make it plain that during the long process through which the present ideas of the value of a park were gaining upon those which they have at last mainly superseded, the public demands, expectations and standards of value in respect to these grounds have been mixed, inconsistent and contradictory. This being realized, it will next be evident that the inherited and transmitted idea of a public park has been one of a body of land held for no clearly defined purposes, which is equivalent to saying, held for purposes always remaining to be determined. It also fol-

lows that the inherited and transmitted idea of the responsibilities of those in immediate direction of these parks has been a corresponding one, and that they have been little subject to popular criticism based on fixed, just and sound principles applicable to public recreation.

Lastly, it follows that the idea fitted to the word park in our minds, when, twenty-two years ago, we began, here in America, dealing with the subject,—having come to us much less from anything that we had seen, or from any dictionary, than through that marvellous process of race nutrition which gives every man his native tongue,—was an idea largely made up of irreconcilable impressions.

The fact remains to be more distinctly emphasized, that it is only through the use of this word of vague and inconstant significance that any limit has been placed upon the purposes to which public money, appropriated to parks, shall be applied.

The simplest statement of purpose that courts would unhesitatingly accept or public opinion stand agreed upon, and, even then, not as a complete statement, but only as true so far as it goes, would be this: "A public park is a ground appropriated to public recreation."

Observe, then, that most of the public properties known as parks contain provisions for other purposes than recreation, and even opposed to recreation. Again, waiving the question how far these are legitimate parts of them, observe that recreation is so broad a term, and means so much more to some than to others, that to devote public funds to recreation is little less than to give a free rein to the personal tastes, whims and speculations of those entrusted with the administration of them.

We must fall back on usage. What, then, does usage prescribe?

In one European public park we find a race-course, with its grandstand, stables, pool-room and betting ring; in another, popular diversions of the class which we elsewhere look to Barnum to provide. In one there is a theatre with ballet-dancing; in another, soldiers firing field-pieces at a target, with a detail of cavalry to keep the public at a distance.

Attempts to introduce like provisions in several of our American parks have been resisted under the personal conviction that they would tend to subvert their more important purpose. In some of our parks, nevertheless, arrangements have been made for various

games; concerts and shows have been admitted; there have been military parades; and it is impossible to find any line of principle between many favored and neglected propositions.

Usage, therefore, in this respect, decides nothing.

Asking what usage prescribes as to the simpler forms of recreation, we shall find that one ground, classed among public parks, consists of dense woods, with a few nearly straight roads through it, while others have open, pastoral landscapes, with circuitous drives, rides and walks; that the interest of one centres in an extremely artificial display of exotics and bedding plants, while another bids fair to be equally distinguished for its fountains, monuments, statues and other means of recreation in stone, concrete and bronze. Yet another is so natural and unsophisticated you can hardly use it in dry weather without choking with dust, or in wet weather without wading in mud.

Again, usage determines nothing.

What this laxity leaves us liable to, and how much may be safely presumed upon the public's confusion of mind, is shown by the fact that in one case, when local opposition was found to be inconveniently strong against the location of a small-pox hospital anywhere else, the difficulty was overcome by placing it in the midst of a park.

I have known orders given in a park, and carried out at considerable expense, the motive and origin of which could be explained only by reference to an idiosyncracy of that class which, to some men, causes eggs or strawberries to be loathsome, and makes cats or curs objects of an irresistible, undefined terror.

The choice of site of most of our parks, and the definition of their boundaries, have been made without the slightest regard for any object of a park, except, possibly, that of securing an air space. Even as with a view to air spaces the locality, in some cases, is nearly the last that should have been selected, and the area taken much broader and greatly more costly than necessary to the purpose.

No one can for a moment suppose that the state of public opinion exemplified in the facts which have been stated, is one favorable to securing what the public most wants in a park, or, if at all, to its obtaining it at reasonable cost.

But the true state of the case will not be fully realized without taking into account certain elements of possible cost of a park which have hitherto had little general consideration.

A town is built to meet the demands of commerce — of commerce in a large sense. As these demands successively arise and their pressure is felt, street is added to street, building to building; railroads, canals and docks are introduced; sewers, water-pipes and gas-lights are pushed out here and there, and thus, not only the extent but the direction of the town's growth is in a large degree controlled by natural laws, the acts of government following much more than leading, directing or resisting the movements of supply and demand.

It will be evident that this element of security against injudicious municipal enterprise applies not at all to our great park trusts. A town does not grow into parks, as it does, by the law of its existence, into buildings and streets; on the contrary, when a great body of land is used as a park in the borders of a town, it will be a serious disturbance of what would otherwise be the natural development of the town.

See, for illustration, how Hyde Park has elbowed out the streets of London. See how the street system of Paris has been kept from its natural development because Catherine de Medici turned a tile-yard into a pleasaunce; or, to take the nearest example, see how the park of New York brings suddenly to a full stop more than ninety streets, which would otherwise constitute forty thoroughfares of commerce, at the very centre of an island which may yet be the most important point of commercial transfer in the world.

That when land is to be bought, or even accepted as a free gift, by a town for a park, its adaptation to the purpose of a park should first of all be considered, and that then none and no more should be taken than is necessary, or at least desirable, for that purpose, will be conceded.

A little consideration, then, will satisfy the Association that a large proportion of the objects which are more or less provided for in our parks might, at less cost and greater value, be provided for in a series of smaller grounds placed as nearly as practicable at regular distances through or around the town.

The argument is briefly this: That such scattered, smaller grounds would be more accessible; would less embarrass other interests of the town; would less interfere with its natural development; would involve less contention with local jealousies and consequent wasteful compromises; and would, on the whole, be less costly.

There is, however, an important element of value in most parks which could not be well provided for in such small local grounds. What is desirable in this respect is a long, unbroken, spacious drive, ride and walk, offering suitable conditions to a large number of people to obtain together moderate exercise in the open air, with such other conditions favorable to gaiety as can be conveniently associated with them.

To a great many persons, perhaps the most of those who have much active influence upon the management of parks, the value of a park lies mainly, and to some it would seem exclusively, in the advantages it offers in this respect. Yet, as affecting these advantages, it will be obvious that the larger part of every park is waste land. Besides which, regarding this object from a point of view commonly taken by many intelligent people, and taking it up as a professional problem, it is little less than absurd to say that it might not be much better met, and at less cost, than it ever has been on any park, new or old. Indeed, from the accounts we have, it would seem that in some southern towns it has been so taken up, not in as clear-headed and bold a way as it might have been, but sufficiently to demonstrate that a result is easily attainable better adapted to the end in view than any we have hoped to attain in our parks.

An arrangement of the general type of the Spanish alamedas, developed with anything like the enterprise and outlay which we have been willing to put on our parks, would, for the purpose in question, be more commodious; its use simpler and more easily and efficiently regulated; there would be less liability to accidents upon it; it might be more effectively decorated, and thus in every way be made to present a gayer, more brilliant and festive scene.

Such an affair, without making half as great a break in our towns as, sooner or later, their parks will, would open a splendid field for the great and admirable enterprise, erudition and skill, which are now given to decorative gardening—a perfectly suitable field for it, which a park seldom offers. It would give fine show room for all the novelties of the market, and would allow a fine scenic arrangement to be made of the superb tropical and subtropical beauties which are just now in fashion, and the best use possible of floral ribbons, embroidery and gew-gaudry which, after doing their worst to degrade and destroy art in landscape gardening, are now, if not wholly going out of fashion, I am glad to say, tending to lapse more nearly to their proper places.

With these advantages, it would cost not nearly as much for land, for construction, for maintenance, or in readjustment of the natural plan of a town.

But, plainly, it is not for this that the "Genius of Civilization" has called for these broad spaces termed parks. In what, then, shall we find the originating impulse, aim and justification of the park-movement?

May we not, perhaps, wisely seek an answer to this question by considering whether there are any other movements of our times with which the park-movement, as we know it, may seem to be related?

If I was right in saying that twenty-five years ago, when we began discussing parks as something to be made for us, the leading idea popularly attached to the word, throughout this country, was one of certain influences of scenery — soothing and reposeful influences — then it is reasonable to suppose that there was something in our motive very closely allied to a social force which, in this same quarter of a century, has had a very remarkable development — a force which has directed the investment of hundreds of millions of private capital in travelling machinery, built up many towns, replenished many treasuries, enriched kingdoms, been a practical matter for statesmanship, and swayed every commercial exchange in the world.

It is open to question whether we care much more than our ancestors did for all manner of beauty of nature; whether we appreciate leaf and flower form and flower color, for instance, more than they. We have a greater variety of flowers; our curiosity about them is more stimulated, our science advanced, we take more interest in them from the point of view of the collector and classifier; they are matters of fashion; we use them more profusely. But there is room for doubt if they act more powerfully upon our sensibilities, and if we make on the whole a more fitting use of them. There can be no like question as to our more general susceptibility to the beauty of clouds, snowy peaks, mountain gorges, forests, meadows and brooks, as we know them in *the broad combining way of scenery*. Even if this doubt should not have weight, it would be much easier to see something akin to regard for scenery in the demand which has led our cities to obtain possession of the broad bodies of land in our parks, than that of interest in the beauty of nature such as may be gratified in a con-

servatory, a garden, a flower-pot or a posey, saying nothing of natural beauty such as exists even in jewels, furs, fruits, or plumage, or in trees individually regarded and as they grow on the lawn of a cottage.

But now, if we call this force interest in the beauty of natural scenery (to distinguish it from interest in the beauty of nature) we shall find another form of its operation from that evinced by tourists and sojourning seekers of scenery in the more general development of talent in landscape-painting and in the demand for education in landscape-judgment, such as is met by works like those of Ruskin, Taine and Hamerton, of which more are now read by Americans in every year than were all works of similar aims by all the world in a hundred years before we began our first park.

Why this great development of interest in natural landscape and all that pertains to it; to the art of it and the literature of it?

Considering that it has occurred simultaneously with a great enlargement of towns and development of urban habits, is it not reasonable to regard it as a self-preserving instinct of civilization?

Mr. Ruskin may be thought not only unpractical but fanatical, and many of his sayings may be regarded as wild, but that he is inspired by a great and good motive, few will doubt. What is the ruling conviction of his zeal? In his own bitter words, it is that "This is an age in which we grow more and more artificial day by day, and see less and less worthiness in those pleasures which bring with them no marked excitement; in knowledge which affords no opportunity of display."

This is true, though a man ten times more unpractical and fanatical than Mr. Ruskin can be thought to be, had said it; and it is also true, that to all the economical advantages we have gained through modern discoveries and inventions, the great enlargement of the field of commerce, the growth of towns and the spread of town ways of living, there are some grave drawbacks. We may yet understand them so imperfectly that we but little more than veil our ignorance when we talk of what is lost and suffered under the name of "vital exhaustion," "nervous irritation" and "constitutional depression"; when we speak of tendencies, through excessive materialism, to loss of faith and lowness of spirit, by which life is made, to some, questionably worth the living. But that there are actual drawbacks which we thus vaguely indicate to the prosperity of large towns, and that they deduct much from the

wealth-producing and tax-bearing capacity of their people, as well as from the wealth-enjoying capacity, there can be no doubt.

The question remains whether the contemplation of beauty in natural scenery is practically of much value in counteracting and alleviating these evils, and whether it is possible, at reasonable cost, to make such beauty available to the daily use of great numbers of townspeople? I do not propose to argue this question. I submit it to the Association as one needing discussion; for if the object of parks is not that thus suggested, I know of none which justifies their cost. On the other hand, if the object of parks is thus indicated, I know of no justification for a great deal that is done with them, and a great deal more that many men are bent on doing. That other objects than the cultivation of beauty of natural scenery may be associated with it economically, in a park, I am not disposed to deny; but that all such other objects should be held strictly subordinate to that, in order to justify the purchase and holding of these large properties, I am inclined to think, cannot be successfully disputed.

I will but add that the problem of a park, as it would appear, under the view which I have aimed to suggest, clear of unfortunate, temporary political ~~trading and~~ necessities, is mainly the reconciliation of adequate beauty of nature in scenery with adequate means in artificial constructions of protecting the conditions of such beauty, and holding it available to the use, in a convenient and orderly way, of those needing it; and in the employment of such means for both purposes, as will make the park steadily gainful of that quality of beauty which comes only with age.

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